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# Americas view

## The Americas



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### The FARC in Colombia

# Make politics, not war

Nov 7th 2013, 11:28 by S.B. | BOGOTÁ

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MANY Colombians are repulsed by the notion that top FARC rebel commanders could end Congress, become mayors or win governorships. But that is precisely what the rebels want to end a half-century of conflict are all about: getting the rebels to give up arms and return to govern. Both sides announced a draft agreement November 6th that would set out a framework for how the FARC, which have been fighting the Colombian state for decades, would return to a political party. Though the accord would take effect only once the final agreement is reached, it marks a turning point for the process.

The negotiations, which were held in Havana, where the negotiations are taking place, the two sides agreed that the accord would "imply the prohibition on using violence as a method of political action". Though the FARC have played politics before—through the Patriotic Union party in the 1990s which eventually saw the murder of 3,000 of its members—they did so while continuing to wage war. "Never again politics and weapons together," Humberto de la Calle, the government's chief negotiator, said.

The agreement would lower the threshold for political movements to be recognised as legal parties. It would also establish mechanisms to ensure the security of members of any party that emerges from a final peace deal.



Most important, it calls for the creation of temporary special congressional districts for areas hardest hit by the conflict. Not coincidentally, those areas are where the FARC have the most influence over the civilian population. The special seats in Congress are a way for the government to ensure the FARC a shot at winning elections.

But that strategy may backfire, according to a poll taken by AmericasBarometer, a project of Vanderbilt University, measuring the perceptions of the peace process. It was conducted both on a national level and in a sample of 111 most-affected municipalities. Predictably, support for the peace process is greater in conflict zones than in the country as a whole. But 65% of respondents in the former (and 71% in the latter) still disapprove of a FARC political party. Only around one in 15 respondents living in conflict areas would consider voting for a demobbed guerrilla in mayoral elections scheduled for 2015. If one were elected, just over one-third of those polled would accept the result. The "electoral viability" of the FARC as political party clearly remains to be seen, says Jorge Restrepo, director of Conflict Analysis Resource Centre, a Bogota think-tank.

The announced agreement breathes new life into a process that was perceived to be in crisis. It was also just the sort of boost President Juan Manuel Santos needed to launch his bid for a second term in a presidential election next May. Fewer than a third of Colombians approve of his presidency. His mentor-turned-nemesis, former president Alvaro Uribe, whose ultra-conservative supporters denounce any deals with the rebel, has cast barbs on the president for being too soft.

The progress in peace talks may propel Mr Santos officially to announce his candidacy. Attacks from Mr Uribe and his lot will then intensify as the electoral campaign heats up and as more progress is made in the talks. Mr Santos had even toyed with the idea of suspending the talks during the election campaign. But after the new agreement was announced he stated: "When we are advancing, when results are being seen, it's not the time to stop. On the contrary [it is time] to accelerate."

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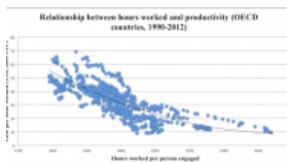
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**remo973** Nov 11th, 16:10

Q&A on Colombia's pace process:

1. Will the narco-chiefs (commanders) get away with thier crimes?  
Most likely, as they will buy insurance in the Santos' deal - free ticket to congress (they are unelectable). But in practice they may be hunted down by their former associates.
2. Will the 15-20 000 fighters reincorporate back in society?  
Wake up. This people will keep their drug making and dealing business. They will repeat the paramilitaries experience - several out of control gangs killing each other to control the trade.
3. How will pace look like?  
Narco-chiefs (commanders) laughing and enjoying their fortunes (scared anyway) and Colombia's murder rate hitting new records for 5 years. Drug trade as good as ever.

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**Maximiliano Herrera** Nov 9th, 04:02

Mr. Santos is betraying his own country, by bowing down to the FARC in THEIR ffdom (Havana) under THEIR conditions. By doing so, he is destroying all efforts made by former president Uribe to

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weaken the guerrilla.

Colombian army was winning the conflict, so it should have negotiated under a position of force, imposing its conditions. What the brothers Castro are seeking is clear: gaining the power in Colombia through elections and then start destroying the democratic institutions piece by piece, just like Chavez had done in Venezuela.

Cuba now has a colony: Venezuela, where it takes all oil resources from , leaving it in misery and chaos. The Castros want another colony: Colombia, which they would transform into a narco dictatorship and suck all the money to keep the Cuban dictatorship alive. This is the plan. It's all CLEAR as pure water.

I find it disgusting how some people accuse Mr. Uribe of human rights violations, when the FARC has systematically violated human rights for more than 50 years. Mr. Uribe is a true patriot, a courageous man and a honest people.

Colombia has never had such a great president: it's a pity Santos now is destroying all his efforts only in search of glory.

yes to peace, but not under the Castro mafia and FARC narcoguerrilla conditions.

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**Hektor Konomi** Nov 7th, 14:17

If they can shave their beards, give FARC a chance...

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**César Grajales** in reply to Hektor Konomi Nov 8th, 14:36

I am a Colombian, born and raised there, and none of the people that comments here knows the cruelty of these Terrorists (FARC). They have killed thousands of innocent Colombians during the last 50 years and continue to do so. They continue kidnapping and killing people, they are drug dealers. They DO NOT represent any Colombian, what good Colombians want, is that they are tried and sentenced for life, for all the horrible crimes they have committed against their people. Please, if you believe you are a good person, do not support the FARC.

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